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## A Coffee With: Robin Cravey, poet, lawyer and environmentalist



By **Alice Shukalo**  
SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN  
Published: 2:14 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2011

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If you're a regular on the hike-and-bike trail on Sunday mornings, you might have seen a man with gray hair and a youthful face sitting on a bench and writing. Not on a laptop, but in a carefully chosen paper notebook and with a pen.

He will have been wearing a hat, set a tilt unless the sun is too strong, not so much to shade his face as to frame it. If it's autumn or winter, he will be bearded. Spring or summer, clean-shaven. He will not be revising a business plan, or making notes for new employee training, or creating a new sales strategy for his company. He will be writing poetry.

Sunday mornings, if you're there at the right time, you can catch Robin Cravey at one of his avocations — the poetic interpretation of his world. At Opal Divine's downtown, Cravey recently talked about his long career as a poet, activist, environmentalist and publisher.

Cravey says that he's been in love with Austin's hiking trails since he got here. "Trails along streams are the best," he says. "A path carved by running water is always filled with life and drama. The motion and music and shine of the water give energy to the mind and the feet."

After many years working in journalism as well as literature, Cravey is now a lawyer as well as a poet. He has a website for his law practice and one for his literary activities. If you go to [www.robincravey.com](http://www.robincravey.com) and read his description of himself, "poet" is listed first, and "lawyer" is way down on the list.

When Cravey first came to Austin in 1969 to attend the University of Texas, he started on a path that resulted in a literary journal called Tilted Planet Tales and in his becoming a mainstay of Austin's literary community. As far as school was concerned, he dropped in, he dropped out, he drove a cab, he traveled as a migrant worker and he just plain traveled. He always kept up his writing, and when he settled in Austin to finish school, he continued to write poetry and became a member of the literary and small-press community.

"Part of the reason that Austin has so many creative people is that the University of Texas pumped out graduates who were willing to stay here," Cravey says. "Back in the seventies, people were willing to give their poetry away. They kept putting out little books, chapbooks, for the sake of having comradeship and community.

[ENLARGE PHOTO](#)

Robin Cravey says he's looking forward to this year's Austin International Poetry Festival. 'As always, I'll continue reading my poems to anyone willing to listen,' he says.

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One of the books said on the first page, 'Any unauthorized publication, reproduction and dissemination will be greatly appreciated.'\u201c2009"

In 1975, Cravey decided to be a student again, but soon he became restless and began hitchhiking around the country. "I wanted to get out of Texas, so I started hitchhiking. I picked tomatoes in Michigan, and in Maine I picked apples. That job in Maine was the best job I've ever had. I loved it. There's a certain way you pick apples. You're up on the ladder and you get your hand around the apple and give it a twist to pull it away from the branch," he says. Cravey holds up his right hand, fingers curled as if to pitch a baseball, and then snaps his hand counterclockwise. "You take the fruit with the least disruption to the source of life."

In 1982, after working as a small-town newspaper editor, Cravey founded Tilted Planet Press, which put out "Tilted Planet Tales," an annual collection of stories by Central Texas writers. He also published "Diverging," a book of his poetry. He says that over the years, he has published about a dozen volumes of "Tales."

"I was able to make Tilted Planet Press work because my friends helped me with the costs of the press. They took on the costs of the printing. The operations were done out of my home: the designing, the planning, the marketing, getting the volumes sold, contacting booksellers — everything," Cravey says.

Then, in the '80s, the economy crashed. In 1992, Cravey, accepting that he would not make a living from literature and small presses, enrolled in law school at the University of Texas. As he says, "When a lot of people were going broke on real estate, I was going broke on poetry."

During law school he worked for the City Council, as executive assistant to Max Nofziger, a former streetside flower salesperson. In the early '80s, Nofziger ran for mayor. He ran three times and didn't win. He did win a council seat, eventually becoming mayor pro tem. Daryl Slusher, a crusading journalist, ran for mayor in the mid-'90s, but didn't win. When Nofziger retired, Slusher won his seat. Cravey worked as an aide for both of them.

Cravey took responsibility for local environmental issues as well, helping to write the Barton Springs Master Plan for the City Council. In 2006, he founded the Friends of Barton Springs Pool, an organization that enlists volunteers to clean the pool and raises funds for improvements.

In 2007, the city hired consultants to write the master plan. The focus was on long-term projects, and Cravey argued that the long-term plan shouldn't prevent short-term projects from being done. In the fall of that year, the council set aside \$6.2 million for short-term projects. In 2008, after his intense involvement with city politics, Cravey ran for City Council, but despite a hard campaign, he didn't win. He decided to concentrate on his law practice, and in 2009, determined to find time for writing and thinking, he started his Sunday writing hikes.

"Swimming in Barton Springs every day had left no time for walking and hiking," Cravey says. "So setting a routine of walking and writing on Sunday mornings was a way to restore balance to my life. And it worked."

"I now have tiltedplanet

press.com," he says. The site is divided into departments. "\u201c2009'Pen, Press, and Pixel' is about literature, publishing, computers and all that. I post some of my poems there." His latest book of poems, "I Am a Comet," is available on Amazon.com.

"As always, I'll continue reading my poems to anyone willing to listen," he says. "Austin International Poetry Festival is coming up in April, and I'm looking forward to that." (Cravey will be one of the featured poets.)

"I've learned a lot and gained a lot of discipline since I first launched Tilted Planet Press in 1982," Cravey says. "I'm optimistic that this incarnation will go farther. But the animating spirit remains a belief that we can see through many of the distractions and choose a path more true to human values, more in tune with nature and more aware of ourselves."

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